

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: August 8, 2013

Agenda Item: Medicine Lodge Access Easements

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Endorse Course of Action

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 Minutes

Background

FWP proposes to purchase two perpetual road easements across private land to provide public motorized access to land administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) in the Medicine Lodge drainage, 35 miles southwest of Dillon, in Beaverhead County. The proposed access easements are three segments of existing private roads, totaling 0.66 miles, that were formerly open through the good will of the landowner and the Block Management Program. The landowner is willing to negotiate access easements with FWP. If successful, the access easements would be conveyed to the BLM, with a reversion clause to FWP in the event the BLM could no longer administer the easements. The access easements would provide significant opportunity for elk, mule deer and moose hunting as well as general recreation.

Public Involvement Process & Results

The BLM initiated access easement negotiations with the landowner and sought partners in FWP and the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF) to complete the project. FWP agreed to make preliminary inquiries of local sporting organization regarding financial contributions to the project. Subsequent coordination and planning put FWP in the lead for securing the access easements. Public pressure to secure reliable hunting access to the Tendoy and Beaverhead Mountains has been steady since the access was diminished in 2012.

Alternatives and Analysis:

Proposed Action: FWP proposes to purchase approximately 0.66 miles of perpetual road easement from a willing landowner to provide motorized access to two large blocks of BLM and USFS administered land. FWP would secure public access to this land primarily for hunting, but also for other economic or outdoor recreational activity.

Road Building Alternative (No Action): FWP would forgo the opportunity to purchase the access easements and the BLM could construct approximately 1 mile of public land access routes. Road building is a viable alternative, but would result in significant disturbance to the land and diminish the opportunity to work cooperatively with a willing landowner.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends Commission approval to proceed with negotiation and purchase of the road access easements from a willing landowner. The project will provide public access to 60,000 acres of BLM and USFS land, an agency priority.

Proposed Motion

I move the Fish & Wildlife Commission endorse the recommendation to begin negotiations for public access road easements to provide public access to BLM and USFS lands in Beaverhead County.